

South Street Memories

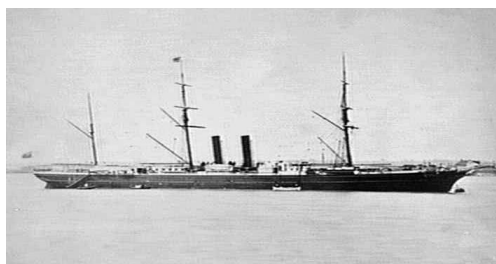
by Robert J. Baptista May 27, 2011



Our Homes at 223 (left) and 219 (right) South Street Today. Note Alleyway and Rear Garages.

Last year I exchanged a few e-mails with my sister Emilia and cousins Millie and Carol about growing up in Elizabeth and the wonderful times we had together at the Jersey shore. As I wrote the e-mails, so many memories came back that I decided to write in more detail and share the experiences with all members of the Imbriaco family. I was also motivated by the genealogy work done for the 1996 Imbriaco family reunion by Lisa and other cousins who prepared the family tree and documentary video.

Our grandparents Giovanni (John, born 1877) Imbriaco and Carmela Marsicano (born 1879) married in Centola, Italy in June 1901. John came to the U.S. first, arriving on the S.S. Gergovia on November 21, 1901. The ship manifest indicated he was a laborer, in good health, could write and was to be met by a cousin. He moved to Hazelton, Pennsylvania where he worked briefly as a coal miner. He came back to Elizabeth and started a landscaping business.



Carmela Traveled on the SS Liguria, Arriving at Ellis Island on December 31, 1902

Carmela arrived on the S.S. Liguria on December 31, 1902. She was traveling with their seven month old daughter Annie and 46 year old cousin Luigi Caputo who had previously been to America. Carmela traveled under her maiden name which was the custom for Italian women at the time. The ship manifest incorrectly listed Annie as a boy "Antonio". Her actual name was Antonetta. The manifest also noted that Carmela could not read or write, was in good health, that her husband paid for her fare and that she had \$60 upon arrival. After going through the day long immigration process at Ellis Island, the family was met by John who was then living at 22 High Street in the Peterstown section of Elizabeth. I can imagine how excited he was to see Carmela after a year's separation and to hold Annie in his arms for the first time.

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Stately Home at 1085 Elizabeth Ave. near Morrell St.

John's landscaping business flourished. At the time there were many large homes in Elizabeth owned by wealthy merchants and professionals who hired John to maintain their manicured lawns and formal gardens.

The Imbriacos lived on Olive St., then 223 South St., and as their family grew, moved to a 14-room home at 44 Reid St. They eventually had nine children including Annie, Dominic, Nunzio, Joseph, who died in a plane crash in 1929, Viola, Millie, Patrick, Mary and Louise. Sadly, John and Carmela died a few months apart in 1942 before many of the grandchildren, including myself, were born. Today the only surviving child is

Louise, age 92.

Viola was my mother and she married my father Joseph Baptista in 1936. Some of the other Imbriaco children had already married and moved into the two 4-family homes at 223 and 219 South St. These large homes were built in 1904 and were within walking distance to the grandparents' home on Reid St. After living in another section of Elizabeth, my parents moved into a ground floor flat at 219 South St. This was on the northern edge of Peterstown, a solidly Italian section of the city since the 1920s. The Peterstown street boundaries ran from South St. to South Fifth St. and from 2nd Ave. to 4th Ave. The Italians living here spanned several generations and were culturally bound to each other, creating one of the most distinctive neighborhoods in Elizabeth.

My cousin Lisa Breiling remembers when I was born in June 1944, just 15 months after Joey. In order to help Mom, Aunt Fill and Uncle Dom took care of Joey and four year old Mia that summer at their bungalow on Pelican Island, near Seaside Heights. This was just one example of how the families helped each other.

My earliest memory of South St.? I clearly recall being wheeled in a baby carriage with Joey up and down the sidewalk and Mom stopping near the big tree just outside our front door. She was talking to a neighbor, I think either Mrs. Gartz or Mrs. Ciccio.

There was a huge snowfall in the late 1940s, with snow piled high in the backyard. The older cousins built an igloo with blocks of snow and we played inside. Lisa and Mia remember it more than I and I think Mia still has a photo of this scene. Cousin Ronny, who lived next door, was born just two weeks before me and we grew up together, sharing many experiences and adventures living on South St.

We had a small Kelvinator refrigerator in our kitchen. Before that Mom had an ice box refrigerator with regular deliveries of ice from an ice house in Peterstown. She left her wedding ring on the sink counter one day and later noticed it was missing. She thought the ice man swiped it on his way out.

Our stove was an old gas-fired model where the burners had to be lit with wooden kitchen matches. It was trimmed in porcelain and chrome with cast iron claw legs. It would be a collector's item today. When I was a toddler, I went missing one day but after a search Mom found me sleeping behind the stove with my favorite blanket and an empty baby bottle in my hand.

Another memory of South St. is taking a long walk one summer with Mom up the South St. hill to a home near Battin High School. There we visited an elderly Italian couple. Mom said the man was related to her father. He grew peaches in his backyard and they were really sweet. I was about four or five years old at the time. They all spoke Italian including Mom.

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I remember visiting Aunt Mary and Uncle Nunz at their nice home on Montgomery St., a few blocks away, and seeing Aunt Mary's parents Mr. and Mrs. Bene. There was a garden in the back or alongside the house. If you were Italian in those days you grew your own vegetables in the summer!

And Italian was the language of choice if Mom wanted to discuss something serious with her brothers or sisters. They spoke Italian growing up. Dad was fluent in Portuguese but understood some Italian.

During the evening social gatherings in the alleyway on summer nights, where we sat on long benches, the adults would switch to Italian when they wanted to keep us kids in the dark. I only learned a few words and phrases.



Battin High School on South Street (All Girls)

There was a large population of Portuguese in Newark and Elizabeth. In 1948 Dad helped his nephew George Botelho come from Portugal to the U.S. George was the son of Dad's sister Anna who also had daughters Esther and Olga. He was a tall, skinny fellow around 19 years old. He lived in our attic with spartan accommodations-just a sleeping cot and a cardboard armoire for his clothing. George picked up English fast from the kids, loved Mom's spaghetti and meatballs, taught us some soccer and learned baseball. He found a job in a factory in Elizabethport and after about a year moved to an apartment down there. George would later marry Rosemary Larangeira and become a successful real estate investor, owning commercial property and apartments on Magie Ave. They had two children-Linda and George Manuel.

Esther married Fred Albuquerque. They started a dry cleaning/tailoring business on Springfield Ave. in Newark. We would visit them on Sundays at their flat on Camden St. They had two boys-Alvin and George- and a daughter Julie. Later they moved their store to Edison because of crime in Newark. Olga married Henry Bartnik and they lived in Orange where they had a son Andrew and a daughter Mary Ann. Three more children followed. Esther and Olga called my Dad "Tiu" for Uncle.



Wedding of Esther and Fred Albuquerque ca. 1948. Mia, Bobby and Joey in Front. Left to Right: Dad, Mom, Anna Botelho, Esther, Fred, Olga Botelho and George Botelho.

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Felix Almeida was Dad's cousin who lived in a flat in Elizabethport. He was a bachelor and worked as a chemical operator at the Du Pont plant in Linden. He was an easy-going guy with an outgoing personality. Once he took us kids on an outing to the Staten Island Zoo. On another occasion he invited us to his place where he cooked an authentic Portuguese meal. After retiring from Du Pont, Felix moved back to Portugal, got married at the age of 77 to a woman many years younger and had three children.

Dad also had relatives in Providence, Rhode Island named Medeiros. They visited us on South St. some summers. Mrs. Medeiros was a loud, very funny lady and her husband Manuel was an ace auto mechanic. On one of their visits, Dad's car would not start and Manuel found the problem was in the contacts of the rotor. He inserted a piece of aluminum foil from his cigarette pack between the contacts and the car started right up. You couldn't do that with today's cars and their complex engines.

St. Anthony's Church, the center of religious life in Peterstown, was located directly across the street from our home and many family christenings, first communions, confirmations, weddings and funerals took place there. We attended Mass every Sunday, followed by Sunday School religious education. Our parents made sure we went to confession regularly. As kids we didn't look forward to this ritual on Saturday afternoons, going into the dark booth and talking to the obscured priest. If you were lucky, penance was just three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys. If you were bad that week, penance was stiffer: the Rosary!

Father Dominic was one on the friendliest and kindest priests there. I remember him from first communion class which he taught outdoors. The nuns wore full habits those days and always looked stern at least to the kids. Women wore hats and gloves to church. The pews had little clips where the men would hang their hats. You would see Italian widows, dressed in black mourning clothes, lighting votive candles. St. Anthony's was hot in the summer, even with fans blowing, and now and then someone would faint. Sermons were suspended in the summer for this reason.

St. Anthony's interior was darker and more mysterious than today's modern churches, with statues of the saints in niches on the sides of the altar. Incense was used more frequently then and the pungent scent filled the air during the liturgy. The mass was in Latin and the priest had his back to the parishioners most of the time, except when he spoke from the pulpit. This pulpit was rather high with winding steps leading up to it. The sermons often were the fire and brimstone variety, putting the fear of hell into children at an early age. There was a weekly announcement of the books and movies the church deemed inappropriate. I recall "The Rose Tattoo", a 1955 film starring Anna Magnani and Burt Lancaster, made the banned list. But Mom and Dad wanted to see it so we all went to the Branford Theater in Newark where it was playing. It had a few steamy love scenes but today would be just a PG-13 movie!



St. Anthony's Church in Peterstown

I remember the Tomkins ice cream parlor on Elizabeth Avenue. Other stores on Elizabeth Ave. come to mind-Olim's soda fountain/news stand, Simon's toy shop where Dad bought my first set of trains around 1950, Grampp's hardware, Fricke's furniture, Sun Rise bakery (best hard rolls), Dietrich's bakery off Smith St. (best donuts), Swede's deli (best potato salad), Dan's Camera, the Morris Aaron bike shop, Leo's clothing store (where the boys bought "pegged" dress pants and dungarees), and further down the Avenue the Bella Palermo bakery (best Italian cookies).

Stasi's little grocery, on the corner of South St. and Reid, had cold cuts and cheeses including Italian imports like cappicola ham. John and Clara Stasi gave credit to people by just writing their tab down in pencil in a note book. He tallied up your bill quickly writing on the back of a brown paper bag-I wish I could have added that fast in school!. A trip to Stasi's to pick up milk, bread and other basics was a daily

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routine for the kids. I would buy a pack of Bazooka bubble gum and inside was a folded up comic. Our parents shopped for their weekly groceries at the Big Bear or A & P supermarkets on the Avenue.



The Sutera Bros. grocery store was on 2nd Avenue and served Peterstown residents who insisted on the best imported Italian cheeses, olive oil and pasta. In the days when autos were less common and few women drove, most everyone walked and local stores like Sutera's benefited. Joseph and Vinnie retired in 2003.

On the corner of South St. and 2nd Avenue was a shoemaker's shop, owned by a friendly Italian named Pellicone.. We got extra mileage out of our shoes with new leather soles and rubber heels with the "Cat's Paw" brand. If your new shoes were too tight, he could stretch them. There were wooden booths where you could sit while the work was being done. The shoemaker held tacks in his mouth as he pounded them into the shoes. A few doors away was a shoe store where you were fitted by placing your feet under an x-ray fluoroscope. We thought it was fun to see the bones in our feet,

blissfully unaware of the radiation hazard. Nor did we have any concern when our dentists gave us quarters coated with mercury!

The cheapest shoes in town were sold at Moe Levy's on 1st St. in Elizabethport. We often shopped there for school shoes and high top galoshes for the snow. One year Joey and I got cool-looking engineer boots-they were high top, leather black boots that motorcycle riders wore, and added two inches to our height. There was a shoeshine parlor on the Avenue near the Sun Rise Bakery and we liked getting shines there on Sunday morning for a quarter. The guy smeared the polish on with his hands. When we visited my godparents Alvaro and Julia Adao in Naugatuck, Connecticut, we would buy Keds sneakers at the company store of the rubber plant where Alvaro worked. They were seconds but looked great to us.

Each September we picked up yards of slick brown paper for covering school books at the local dry cleaners on Elizabeth Ave. for a quarter. School supplies were purchased at Newman's five and dime store across the street. Mrs. Newman watched you closely to make sure you didn't shoplift something. She always called me "my friend" even though she wasn't too friendly. Next door was Colton's drug store. There was a hat shop and Klein's dry goods where Mom bought fabrics for sewing dresses. She had worked as a sewing machine operator for the Mannheim Company as a young girl, leaving school after the sixth grade to help support her family.

Patriotic parades came down the Avenue on Memorial Day and July 4 and we never missed one. Lisa told me she remembers the impressive parades celebrating the end of WW II. We watched them from the Olympia Square monument plaza, at the intersection of South St. and Elizabeth Ave., which had a cannon from the Spanish-American War. I saw one of these old parades on YouTube recently.

Dr. Knauer's impressive Victorian home with a wrap-around porch was on the corner of Elizabeth Ave. and Reid St. Behind the home was a tile lined goldfish pond and a huge weeping tree that we could see from our back yard. It was a beautiful sight on a windy day, with the long branches swaying, but had to be cut down after lightning struck it one summer



Olympia Square with Spanish Cannon

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night. The Knauer residence was later demolished to make room for a parking lot. Nearby was Dr. Lombardo's office where we went for checkups-he even made house calls when we were sick, unheard of today. After a shot of penicillin and cough medicine from Colton's, we were back in school the next day or two. Another doctor who came to South St. was named Rumson or Rumsey; I think he was Ronny's doctor.

By the time we were five almost everyone had their tonsils out, which required an overnight stay in the nearby Elizabeth General Hospital. Joey and I had our tonsils out the same day. Ether was the only anesthetic and was poured over a funnel placed over your mouth while you counted backwards from 100. I was knocked out at the count of 95. The only upside to this procedure was having a steady diet of ginger ale and ice cream for the next day or two while your throat healed.



Harmonia Bank and Minuteman Statue at Union Square
Tower on Left is the Rising Sun Brewery on Seventh St.

I remember the polio epidemic of the early 1950s when we were warned to stay away from the city pools in Linden and Rahway. Fortunately none of us contracted the disease but we all went through bouts of the measles, mumps or chicken pox.

My parents banked at the Harmonia Savings Bank at Union Square on the Avenue, where there was a Revolutionary War Minuteman monument, commemorating a 1780 battle that delayed the advance of British soldiers.

The Uncles were an important part of our life, looked out for us, and were good role models. I'm still impressed with Uncle Dom's, Pat's, and Nunz's rare combination of mechanical aptitude, fixing anything from cars to homes, and business savvy-running the D & B (Dominic and Brothers) used car business on N. Broad St. and then launching the very successful Colonial Motor Court in Springfield. This was one of the first businesses on Rt.22, surrounded at that time by fields where they hunted for pheasant with Uncle Al in the fall.



In the 1920s Uncle Nunz worked at the Durant Motors assembly factory on Frelinghuysen Avenue, installing seat covers on new cars. Lisa said he was an expert upholsterer and later reupholstered some furniture with Naugahyde for her. The factory later became the home of Burry Biscuit.



Former Durant Motors Factory Where Uncle Nunz Worked in the 1920s Assembling the "Star" Model

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Uncle Pat built his first fishing boat, about a 20 ft. wood one, in the garage on South Street. He built it from a kit and it took him a year, an incredible feat of carpentry and workmanship. The nephews enjoyed many fishing trips on this beautiful craft which he sold some years later for a larger boat. After coming back from the shore, he put the outboard motor in a garbage can full of water and ran it to flush out the salt water. He also loved fine cars and had a new model every 2-3 years. One winter day he took Ronny, Joey and I with him to inspect the construction progress on the new bungalow in Ocean Gate. He treated us to lunch at the diner in Toms River. This was probably around 1953. A construction worker at the bungalow had died in a car fire and I remember the scorch mark on the driveway.

Most of us had big collections of comic books despite Uncle Pat's warning that reading comics would damage our eyesight (I later needed thick eyeglasses!). We liked to hop fences to the neighbor's yards and when Uncle Pat saw this, he said jumping off fences would cause flat feet (I did get flat feet but they kept me out of the Army during Vietnam).

My favorite comics were Superman and Batman. Ronny had a nice collection of the "classic" comic series with titles like Knights of the Roundtable and Robin Hood. We told our parents these were educational! Cynthia like reading about teenage Archie and Veronica. If we had kept the first issues of some of these comics, they would sell for a fortune today. Marvel Comics No. 1 of Superman recently sold for \$1.5 million.

If your bike tire went flat, Uncle Pat had a repair kit with "Camel" patches, which he put on the inner tube with a clamp, and then lit the ignitable material to vulcanize the rubber. The smell was awful but the tire was as good as new. Other repairs were made in a workshop alongside the garages, well equipped with auto tools, a drill press and a vise. This shop was padlocked because of the valuable tools inside.

Uncle Dom was constantly tinkering with car engines, old motorcycles, and lawnmowers which he restored to original running condition. He made his own sinkers for fishing by melting lead and pouring it into molds. He had a classic "Indian" brand motorcycle, with a dark green finish, that would be worth a lot of money today. My cousin Frank Imbriaco said Uncle Dom was the lead motorcycle mechanic for the Elizabeth Police in the 1920s. His mechanical knowledge was on the level of an engineer.

Uncle Dom's favorite snacks were Italian cheeses and apples. He always carried a nifty penknife for hacking into cheese and deftly carving up an apple. Outwardly he was a thrifty guy, wearing old clothes and happily driving an older model Oldsmobile 88. After the Garden State Parkway opened in the 1950s, he refused to pay the tolls and went to the shore the old way via Routes 1/9 and 35. He would stop at a farm to pick up fresh eggs.

Uncle Dom was a little gruff but very compassionate. His son Joe told me that he and his father often visited the "creek", at the juncture of the Elizabeth River and Arthur Kill, where his fishing boat was moored. Uncle Dom would bring cooked dinners like spaghetti or turkey to the boat yard master, who lived in a tin shack heated by a kerosene stove. The floor was covered with a piece of used linoleum and there were a few pieces of old furniture. I went with Uncle Dom on one of these visits during Christmas, and he gave the man a burlap bag of oranges and grapefruit. Joe said they would also go aboard a tugboat that tied up in this area at night. Mr. Van Pelt was the captain. Joe said he had few teeth and reminded him of Popeye. The Van Pelt family had a tugboat service on the Kill since the late 1800s.



Arthur Kill Boatyard Today. Photo Courtesy of Dan Cordle.

Lisa recently told me that Joe once got his arm caught in the wringer of their old fashioned washing machine in the cellar. Uncle Pat rescued him and brought him to the hospital for treatment of his injuries. Luckily his bones were still soft and not broken but he did need some surgery.

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I actually don't remember Joe too much since he was away at Notre Dame and Harvard for most of the '50s, scoring high marks and becoming a very successful lawyer. I do recall meeting Ann Joan when they got engaged. And I think Joe drove a tan 1950s era Chevrolet.

While Uncle Pat and Dom were quick to correct our behavior, Uncle Nunz was less preachy in dealing with us boys. I don't remember him ever hollering at us. He was the fun-loving, good times Uncle. He liked going to Monmouth Park to play the horses. I admired him as the successful business man who enjoyed the good things in life. Always wore the best suits, flashy sport coats, drove the latest model Cadillac and had a winter tan. And what a winning smile!

We always had a live tree at Christmas, purchased from a vendor on the Avenue. One year we made the mistake of buying it at night. When it was setup at home, the tree was a sorry sight. Dad went back to the vendor, got branches and stuck them into holes he drilled in the trunk to fill the tree out. Then we decorated it-the lights is those days were large multi-color bulbs, not the tiny ones we use today. Tinsel was popular too. I believed in Santa Claus until I saw Dad bringing up my new Schwinn bike from the cellar late at night. I must have been five or six at the time and thought it smart not to mention this to my parents for another year or so.

On Christmas Day Uncles Nunz, Pat and Dom would go from house to house gifting the kids with new silver dollars (wish I had kept them!). At each stop they would get a shot of whiskey from our Dads to celebrate. I'm sure they were feeling good by the end of their rounds!

Lisa had a cat who didn't want to be petted by kids and scared the heck out of us by hissing and scratching. While we were playing in the cellar, the cat jumped out from its hiding place in the woodpile-we thought it was a big rat until we got a better look at it running upstairs. Once Albie, Ronny and I were playing outside cursing a blue streak. Aunt Fill came to the window and told us to cut out the foul language or she would wash our mouths out with soap. Hearing that ominous threat, we hightailed it out of there fast!

Uncle Emil was fussy with his flowers and plants-he didn't like kids running through the beds. But he took us to watch soccer games in Newark on Sundays. He liked to bowl and we went with him to an alley in Elizabethport in the days when pin boys reset the pins. He loved playing pinochle with his friends at the Portuguese Club in Elizabethport, which later moved to a new building on Rt. 1 near the Bayway circle.

He would pay Ronny and me to Simoniz his green Pontiac that had the huge chrome bumpers missing from today's cars. In the summer he and Aunt Millie spread sheets on the ground and we climbed into the mulberry tree to shake down the berries. On an Easter outing in Warinanco Park he was filming us with his ever present movie camera and lost the rubber lens cap. I found it in the grass and was happy to get a quarter for a reward, which I spent on more comics at Olim's. I remember he was one of the last men on the block to still shave with a straight razor. He gave haircuts to the Uncles in a barber's chair in the cellar.

Uncle Emil worked as a foreman for Weston Instruments in Newark, a company that made electrical measuring equipment and appliances:



Uncle Emil Worked at Weston Instrument in Newark

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He once found an Italian bakery in Newark with an old fashioned brick oven. Every now and then he brought back hot loaves for the families after work. I thought the best Italian bread in our neighborhood was not from Saraceno's but from Petrillo's located further down 3rd Ave. We used to go there after church at St. Anthony's and bought square slices of thick pizza for a dime.

I loved dipping Italian bread in Mom's gravy simmering on the stove most Sunday mornings. She had one of the best tasting sauces on the block. I also liked Aunt Millie's veal dishes. She always had jelly donuts from Dietrich's Bakery on Smith St., where she worked (she gave you 15 donuts if you ordered a dozen). And Aunt Mary Forestiere's home-made apple pies-wow!! The rear hall and stairways to the flats were filled with wonderful cooking aromas at suppertime.



Uncle Frank loved movies and took us to see every western, war movie and pirate movie made in the 1950s. I recall the Ritz, Liberty, New, Regent, Royal and State theaters-two movies, a newsreel and two cartoons for about 35 cents.

We all had a favorite movie genre-Albie liked westerns and Ronny and I liked horror films starring Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff. The movies were air conditioned and a great place to spend a few hours on a hot summer day in Elizabeth. Our favorite concession stand candies were Juju Fruits, Raisinets, Nonpareils, Goobers, Bon Bons and Milk Duds. No wonder we had so many cavities!

I remember taking the long walk with Ronny down Elizabeth Ave. to the State theater where we saw

"Moby Dick", with Gregory Peck, one of the best movies of the era. After going to movies at the Liberty, we would stop at a place on Elizabeth Ave. for a 25 cent burger. Our parents collected sets of dishes from the theaters-you received one place setting for each admission. One of the theaters, I think the Ritz, had a organ and I remember a live performance during intermission time.

Uncle Frank tried to teach Aunt Louise to drive but she lost control of the car in the driveway, hitting the garage and putting a dent in the car. He was a big easygoing guy and I don't think he was too upset. He played cards with us and when we watched Superman on TV with Richie (Johnny and Tommy were still small), Uncle Frank enjoyed it just like a kid. He liked to read and had many classic books.

Uncle Al was the go to man for fixing plumbing, heating and carpentry problems. He was really gifted with his hands and worked in home construction for many years. Some of these jobs were in Pennsylvania and he would leave home around 5 AM to get there. Remember the old mustachioed Sabrett hot dog man with the floppy hat in the open-air market on Saturdays? Uncle Al said he was a relative of the Forestieres.

Uncle Al usually bagged a deer during his hunts in New Jersey and Pennsylvania every fall. One year he came home with one tied to his car fender. Dad butchered it for him and his brothers. Once we went to his brother Philly's house where we had venison stew. Even the brains of the deer were served but I said no thanks. I remember seeing Philly's scarred legs at the Ocean Gate beach and learned he was badly wounded by machine gun fire while serving in WW II in Europe. Uncle Al had another brother Frank and a sister Mildred who also lived in Elizabeth, somewhere around Madison Ave. We would see their kids now and then. I remember Deanie and Vincent who were about our age.

Uncle Al and Dad made their own wine in the cellar, buying grapes at the Newark open air market in the fall. Some grapes also came from the vineyard Dad had in the "little yard", a patch of grass in the back that was fenced off. I still wonder how they knew when the wine was done fermenting and was ready for storage in a wood barrel.

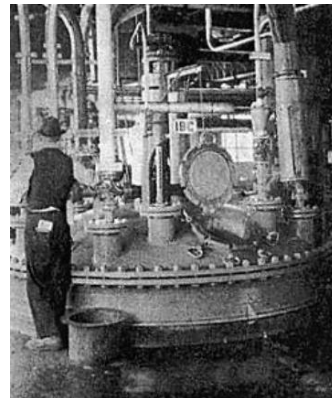
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One year we went with Dad to a used appliance dealer in Newark and bought an old gas stove for \$25 to use in the cellar. The fall season was canning time, when the Aunts got together in the cellar, put on their aprons (which moms today don't even own), and started by sterilizing Ball glass jars in a pressure cooker. Several of the Uncles would go to the Newark open air market to buy boxes of fruit. Then the Aunts filled the jars with peaches, pears and roma tomatoes that lasted all winter. The cellar was steeped with steam vapors and wonderful aromas during canning time. I don't think anyone got sick eating these homemade preserves.

Dad was the serious type and definitely the head of the household. He was the breadwinner and Mom the homemaker, although she went back to work as a sewing machine operator when we were older. I remember being in a play at Continental School 3 and Mom expertly sewing the costumes for the cast (no I wasn't a Pilgrim-in this play we were forest elves). Mom made the decisions regarding vacations and social visits to our relatives to which she would usually bring a boxed cake from Saraceno's bakery. Mom was thrilled when we got our first telephone in the early 1950s even though it was a party line. I recall Aunt Millie was one of the other parties on our line in addition to a family in Peterstown. If you had an emergency you had to ask the other party to hang up, but there was never a problem.

Dad came to this country from Portugal when he was around twenty, settling in Providence, Rhode Island with cousins. Before that he travelled to Brazil and worked on a sugar plantation for a year or so. He said chewing on raw sugar cane ruined his teeth and that's why he wore false teeth. He eventually came to Elizabeth and worked as a butcher in Elizabethport. Mia said he and Mom met at a Portuguese dance. They eloped in 1936 and got married in a civil ceremony. Dad became a naturalized citizen in 1941. They had a marriage ceremony at St. Anthony's in 1946 with Father De Martini officiating.

In WW II Dad found a better paying job as a chemical operator at the General Aniline & Film plant in Linden 9 (see photo below). He worked rotating shifts so Mia, Joey and I had to keep the noise down if he was sleeping during the day. Cats meowing in the alleyway would wake him up at night. He would get up cussing, once throwing his slipper at them and on another occasion a pot of water. Mom packed his lunch for work, always with a quart Mason jar of hot A & P Bokar coffee. At work he put the jar on a steam pipe at work to keep it warm. In those days companies didn't provide uniforms so Dad wore a heavy shirt and dungarees. Mom laundered his work clothes weekly-they were stained with dyes and had holes from the acid he worked with. During labor union strikes, some lasting months, he would work as a butcher in a store in Elizabethport. An accountant from the plant came to our house each April to prepare the federal tax return-I think Dad paid him \$10.



Dad Worked as a Chemical Operator at the General Aniline & Film Plant in Linden

Mom's province was the kitchen where she made "gravy" once a week. Cooked in the gravy were meatballs, Italian sausage and braciola-a rolled-up breaded flank steak that was a favorite of mine. She also liked making her own ravioli and lasagna which took hours. In the winter she made chicken soup with greens and pastina weekly. One of the favorite pies she baked was lemon meringue.

Dad liked hearty meals like beef stew, ham with cabbage, and would put sardines on his plain spaghetti on meatless Friday nights. Now and then Mom would cook "baccala", a Portuguese boiled meal with

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salted cod, potatoes and greens, which greatly pleased Dad but not us kids. He even liked eels, caught at the Jersey shore. He brought them home live in a basket and put it the cellar. They writhed around like snakes and the chopped-off heads still snapped at our fingers.

Dad always had a glass of red wine with dinner from a gallon jug of Gallo. He grew up drinking wine in Portugal and I don't remember him ever drinking soda or milk. Mia made pizza for us on Friday nights, with dough from Saraceno's Bakery. Next door was Spirito's Restaurant but we only ate there once or twice. Their sauce was too spicy for my taste.

Mom liked ginger ale and creme soda was a favorite of us kids. We had glass bottles of soda delivered in a wooden case from the Boller Company in Elizabethport. Nobody drank bottled water-I doubt if it was even sold back then. Laundry bleach was called bianco lino (pronounced byaan-GOH-leen) and was delivered in unlabeled glass gallon jugs weekly. Milk was delivered to our front porch for years by Gus Andrade, a Portuguese fellow who gave us rides on the back of his open truck. Milk came in glass containers with the cream floating on top. Low fat milk was unheard of. Gus always wore a milkman's uniform and came around weekly to collect payment. Mom usually gave him a cup of coffee in the kitchen. I think Dad was a little jealous of the attention Mom got from Gus.

Door to door salesmen were common in the 1950s, selling Fuller brushes, Electrolux vacuums and other household items. Dad purchased a set of Encyclopedia Britannica books from a salesman which helped us with school assignments on history or geography. The updates came by mail, not online like today.



Dugan's Bakery Truck

Aunt Millie liked to have bread delivered by Dugan's Bakery in Newark; raisin bread was her favorite. Other peddlers who came around in trucks were the "rag man", a fruit seller, and a guy who sharpened knives and scissors. He brought a pedal operated grinding wheel into our back yard to do the work. You could hear these peddlers hawk their services as they drove up and down South St.

Another delivery the kids liked to watch was coal for the steam furnaces. The cellar window would be opened for a chute from the truck in the alleyway. Then a ton or two of coal would roar down into a

bin in the cellar. Even the Moms helped shovel coal into the furnace during winter. Later an automatic coal feeder was installed. But the heavy ashes still had to be shoveled out and hauled to the curb for the garbage men (Fereday & Meyer Co.) to pick up. What a mess!

I remember seeing on a few occasions an organ grinder with a monkey walking along South Street, with the monkey holding out a tin cup for donations. The organ grinder was either an itinerant panhandler or a recent immigrant trying to make a living as a street performer by cranking out a tune on a small organ strapped to his chest.



Curtains were washed frequently, soaked in Argo corn starch and then stretched over a wooden frame to dry outside. Laundry was done in a washing machine in the cellar with a wringer that could pinch your fingers if you weren't careful. No one had a dryer so the wet clothes were hung on a clothesline in the cellar during the winter and outside in warm weather. Putting the clothes on the outside line and then pulling them when dry through the kitchen window gave the Moms another chance to

check on us playing in the backyard. Once we boys were fighting outside and one of the Aunts, I think Aunt Angie, came to the window and said something like "You better cut it out now or I'll tell your fathers when they come home from work and then you'll be sorry". The Aunts and Uncles really looked out for us although back then we didn't appreciate it!

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The Moms were busy all day long, not just with household chores, but raising their kids. They prepared a hot breakfast, got us ready for school, packed a lunch, checked homework, took us shopping for clothes, arranged doctor visits, and cooked supper. They rarely complained. The only thing my Mom would say now and then is "a woman's work is never done" as she tackled the next task.



American Airlines Plane Crash Near Battin High School. Photo: Life. Feb. 4. 1952

In the early 1950s there were three airliner crashes in Elizabeth. One plane on the approach to Newark Airport hit a home near Battin High School. Dad drove us to the scene the next day. It was raining and I recall seeing the fuselage, passenger seats and smoke coming out of the wreckage at this sad scene. Six residents died and all twenty-three people on board perished including Secretary of War Robert Patterson.

I think over a hundred people died in these three crashes which marked a tragic chapter in Elizabeth's history.

Dad bought our first TV, a 12 inch black and white RCA tabletop model, in 1949. It cost around \$400, a lot of money for a working man. The other families had Emerson and Dumont models. All these TVs were built in factories in New Jersey. Some people put a magnifying screen in front of the TV to enlarge the tiny picture. Initially the only shows were cartoons, news, Yankee ball games, boxing matches and Sid Caesar's "Show of Shows". And programming didn't begin till 5 PM. The rest of the day the screen was blank. Yet we somehow survived without 24/7 cable channels or a remote control.

Dad was glued to the set when the McCarthy hearings, about Communists infiltrating the government, were televised. His favorite news anchor was Edward R. Murrow, always seen smoking a cigarette on the air. Mel Allen and Red Barber openly drank Ballentine beer while broadcasting the Yankee games.

We liked the kid shows Kukla, Fran & Ollie, Howdy Doody with Clarabelle the mute clown who honked a horn to communicate, The Merry Mailman (with Rav Heatherton on WOR Channel 9). The

Buster Brown Show (remember Andy Devine saying "Pluck your magic twanger, Froggy?"), Hopalong Cassidy, The Lone Ranger, and The Cisco Kid. A favorite game show was Beat the Clock, where contestants performed silly stunts and Bud Collyer was the host. Amos & Andy and the Life of Riley, starring William Bendix who I remembered from the pirate movies, were popular series too.

The early TVs had tubes which got very hot and burned out frequently. A serviceman came to the house at least once or twice a year to replace tubes. The channel tuner was flimsy so Dad insisted on changing the channels himself, saying we turned it too fast and too often!

We looked forward to getting away from the hot Elizabeth streets every summer. Dad was off the first two weeks in July when the General Aniline plant closed for maintenance. Ocean Gate and Pelican Island were wonderful places for our summer vacations. Initially the families rented a large bungalow in Ocean Gate where we all stayed together. There was no need to eat out with so many talented Italian cooks in house!



1949 RCA 12 Inch B&W TV

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Later we stayed with Uncle Pat and Aunt Angie right after their bungalow was built. I remember this was June 1953 because someone at the bungalow had picked up the New York Daily News from the corner store one morning. The front page announced the Rosenbergs were executed at Sing Sing prison for spying and showed photos of Julius and Ethel laying in coffins. A grim reminder that nuclear war with Russia was a real threat back then.

Remember the traffic jams on the old routes to the Jersey shore before the Garden State Parkway opened? Dad had a 1938 Studebaker sedan, which looked like a gangster's car, and it boiled over several times on one trip to the shore. I'm sure we were whining "when are we going to get there" from the back seat for hours!



1938 Studebaker Similar to Ours

Some summers we stayed with Uncle Dom and Aunt Fill in their bungalow on Sunset

Drive, Pelican Island, near Seaside Heights. The Forestieres stayed at Uncle Al's parents bungalow in Ocean Gate. Uncle Al's mother had a garden in the backyard for tomatoes and vegetables, which flourished in the warm sandy soil. She was a talented cook too-I loved her pepper and egg sandwiches.

For breakfast at Aunt Angie's and Uncle Pat's bungalow, we had fresh rolls and creme-filled buns from a bakery down the block. When we came back from the beach for lunch, it was pre-made sandwiches which we quickly wolfed down because we were in a hurry to get back to the beach. But our parents made us wait an hour after eating to avoid drowning from cramps!

Dad liked the rough water at the Seaside Heights beach. He was a strong swimmer and could float on his back for what seemed like hours. And he liked deep sea fishing for bluefish with the Uncles. Mia was a good swimmer too and loves the beach scene to this day.

At Pelican Island the surrounding Bay was calm for swimming if you didn't want to deal with the cold water and waves at Seaside Heights. As small kids Joey and I preferred the preferred the calmer Bay. I recall swimming with cousins Carol and Joanie, perhaps before Bobby was born. I remember staying at the original bungalow on the Bay jointly owned by the Uncles. Uncles Dom and Nunz would seine in the Bay for crabs and small fish they used for bait. Joanie liked to seine too. We learned to crab with wire traps baited with chicken necks, scooping up the crabs with a long pole net. The steamed blue crabs for supper were memorable!

Uncle Dom built his own bungalow across the street from the Bay around 1950. Lisa said the plans were provided by Joe who was taking a drafting course at Thomas Jefferson High School. Unfortunately the plans left out necessities like closets but the kids who enjoyed summer vacations there never noticed. And we didn't pay much attention to the trucks that sprayed DDT along the streets at night to control the hordes of pesky mosquitoes from the Bay.

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Wooden Bridge on Barnegat Bay ca. 1940s

Some nights we went to the boardwalk at Seaside Heights. The bridge from Pelican Island was made from tar coated wood and one summer it caught fire. The fat lady laughing in the booth on the boardwalk scared the hell out of me. She had garish makeup and swung her head of yellow hair wildly back and forth. It took a few years of growth before I could laugh at her.

The aromas from the food stands cooking sausage and peppers were fabulous. We loved Kohr's ice cold orange floats. Another stand had coffee flavored popcorn, which I haven't found anywhere else. Now and then we would win something playing the wheels. My parents won a nice looking lamp one night.



Kohr's Food Stand on Boardwalk

One of Aunt Fill's classic dishes, enjoyed greatly by Uncle Dom, was linguine with clam sauce. When we vacationed at Pelican Island, I had this for the first time and got to like it. It was usually served on Friday in the days when Catholics were prohibited from eating meat. Clams from the store-no way. Uncle Dom gathered the clams himself that morning.

There was a handy outdoor shower behind the bungalow that Uncle Dom rigged with a copper pipe on top to catch the sun's rays and heat the water. But you had to remember to mix it with cold water!

Uncle Dom was very inventive and way ahead of his time in energy conservation! At night there was music from the mandolins of Uncles Dom and Emil, the accordion of Uncle Pat, and sing alongs until the wee hours. What a tight knit family we were back then!



Wildwood Avenue Pier and Beach at Ocean Gate ca. 1950s.

At the Ocean Gate beach one day Patty was going down the pier sliding pond head first and hit something on the way down, chipping his front tooth. He was afraid to tell his father, so he packed his tooth with creme cheese. When Uncle Pat came back from the motel that night, we sat down for

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dinner and noticed Patty's tooth had lost the protective creme cheese packing and the gig was up! Uncle Pat was upset but calmed down and I think Patty went to a dentist the next day.

I had a similar incident at South St. when young Jimmy Forestiere threw a stone my way which chipped my front tooth. It wasn't as bad as Patty's mishap. Dr. Wolf smoothed out the jagged edge. I also remember going to the Elizabeth General Hospital emergency room for x-rays on my hands which got squeezed between a trailer bed and its wheel while we were playing on it. Luckily no bones were broken, just bruising. Some of the other cousins needed emergency room visits for stitches. I remember Ronny fearlessly jumping a home-made ramp with his bike. We kids were rather reckless those days! And of course there were a few scraps with neighborhood boys. The trip home from School 3 could be perilous if you were walking home alone, especially in winter when snowball fights broke out. But we had a convoy of older cousins to protect us!

The playground on 3rd Ave. was a favorite spot for the cousins when our parents told us to "go outside and play". We spent hours there unsupervised. There was a ball field, swings, seesaws, a slide, and a whirling platform where you held on tightly or else you were thrown off. Contrast that to today's playgrounds where this equipment is nowhere to be found, the ground is covered with rubber, and the parents are hovering over their kids every move!

With so many cousins to play with, you were never bored. We liked to wander the jungle-like thickets on the banks of the Elizabeth River looking for punks to smoke. Once we setup a camp there, building a fire and cooking potatoes. Another time we encountered older kids who had BB rifles and stringers of dead birds they had shot. They were upset that we found their secret hunting ground and threatened us so we ran out of there as fast as we could!

Back home there were stickball games in the alleyway with Patty, Johnny, Ronny, Albie, and Joey. I remember Albie could hit the ball over the roof of the garages. Little Millie's husband Chet would join us at stickball now and then and had a mighty swing. Joey, who wrote right-handed, but swung and caught lefty, was a good ball player and came close to being selected for a Little League team when tryouts were held in Warinanco Park.

We used to build things like forts and go-carts, using materials scavenged from the garages or from an auto salvage yard a few blocks away. On rainy days you could still play games in the cellar or in the garages. Exploring the family treasures in the attic and sliding down the wood banister from the second floor were always fun. Monopoly was popular and would keep us occupied for hours at the kitchen table. Mia easily beat Joey and I at Scrabble. The most popular card game was "War" because it was the easiest to learn and fast paced. Ronny was a wiz at chess, Uncle Pat's boys played the accordion and built model air planes from balsa wood. The smelly airplane dope was intoxicating!

I remember the summer time picnics on Sundays with our families at Roosevelt Park in Edison. This was an all day event the kids really enjoyed. Dad would buy a block of ice from the ice house in Peterstown, which was chopped up with an ice pick and used to keep the meats and other perishables cold in a galvanized tub. On the way to the park we stopped at a store on Park Ave. in Linden to buy a bag of charcoal. Going into the park, we passed the Roosevelt Hospital for tuberculosis patients.

In the park we explored woods and streams, caught frogs, and played horseshoes while our parents fixed meals on the charcoal barbecue pits. At lunch time we had a regular dinner like spaghetti and meatballs or barbecued chicken. On one occasion Dad's Portuguese relatives joined us and Mom cooked a rabbit dinner with rice. It was a different tasting meat but quite good. We also had grilled fish and the hot Portuguese sausage chourico. I remember George and Rosemary Botelho, and her sister Amelia and husband Alvaro, were with us.

Sometimes we would see gatherings of Gypsy families in Roosevelt Park. They all wore distinctive dress, including the children. I wondered where they lived, what they did for a living and if the children went to school.

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At one of our picnics Uncle Pat asked one of his boys to retrieve something from the car. When he returned he realized he locked the car keys in the car. But cars back then had door buttons, so Uncle Pat found a hanger wire, made a loop at the end, threaded it thru the window, and fished for the door lock button. In a few minutes the door popped open!

In the evening there were grilled Italian sausage (Uncle Al's specialty), hotdogs and hamburgers followed by watermelon and coffee and dessert. On the way home we stopped at a natural spring in the park and filled glass jugs with the good tasting water. These were really memorable days spent with our extended family.

Each Easter we lined up in front of the garages for a group photograph, posing in our Sunday best outfits. You could see the progression in our growth as this photo was taken each year.



Left to Right: Lisa, Patty, Mia, Johnny, Cynthia, Bobby, Albie, and Joey-around Easter 1947

At Easter time, we usually went to the Rosedale Cemetery in Linden where Mom visited the graves of her parents John and Carmela Imbriaco, and her brother Joseph, who died in a plane crash in 1929 while learning to be a pilot. Nearby was the grave of John Imbriaco, Aunt Fill and Uncle Dom's son, who died in 1942 at only 8 years old due to cancer.

One summer we joined the Fonsecas on a day trip to Rye Beach and the Playland amusement park in New York. We took an excursion boat, similar to a large ferry, from Elizabethport. Another outing to Wolfe's Pond Park and Beach in Staten Island was disappointing-there was garbage on the beach and the water was polluted. We would also go to Cook's Lake in north Jersey for picnics and swimming. Mom got a bad case of poison ivy there one summer.

During summers we typically spent a weekend with my godparents Alvaro and Julia Adao at their home in Naugatuck, Connecticut. Al was Portuguese and my father's cousin. He loved driving a flashy Studebaker Hawk, sporting mirrored sunglasses while he sped us around the hills and curves of Connecticut roads. On one of these trips we spent the weekend at their campground in northwestern

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Connecticut. I remember we went swimming in an ice cold river near our tent and ate meals cooked over a camp stove. Uncle Al and Aunt Julia, as we called them, had no children and really enjoyed our visits with them.

When one of the families got a new refrigerator, we turned the box into a clubhouse. We painted "Girls Keep Out" on it! But where were Lisa, Mia, Cynthia and Connie anyway? The girls had their own favorite games and activities-roller skating, hopscotch, jumping rope, playing "red light, green light", music lessons, movies and so forth. Lisa played the piano and Mia the violin. She took lessons from Mr. Jelinek on Reid St. and used to carry her violin to school. I still remember the first screechy rendition of "Turkey in the Straw" but Mia became very skilled with the violin. Lisa and Mia would get together for musical duets.

Sometimes the girls would join the boys for hide and seek. Lisa remembers even going around the block to hide. The boys would also play "potsy" with the girls-this was a local kind of hopscotch played with a used flat rubber heel on a grid chalked on the ground. I think Uncle Pat eventually painted this grid on the concrete in the backyard. And of course the girls enjoyed the beaches, swimming and boardwalk at the Jersey shore as much as the boys.



The girls often went on shopping expeditions with their mothers "uptown", which meant Broad St. This was the main shopping area of Elizabeth, with finer stores than those on the Avenue. Department stores included Goerke's and Levy Bros. which had multiple floors serviced by old fashioned elevators. Each had an elevator operator who selected the floor on a large dial and manually operated the doors. I remember visiting Santa at Goerke's during Christmas.

One of the kids we played with in Peterstown had an uncle who raised homing pigeons. We saw the coop on the roof to which the pigeons returned after flying around town. We decided to take this hobby up and asked Dad to build a coop. He found an old wooden bureau which he converted with chicken wire into a coop with separate pens. We put the coop in the garages and bought a few pigeons from Watt's Pet Shop on the Avenue, feeding them corn. But when we released them, they never came back! I guess the coop should have been on our roof.

We were never lucky keeping a dog at South St. Once summer Mia brought back a stray from Ocean Gate that we called Fluffy. But he snapped at people and after he bit Patty, Dad took him to the pound. A large black dog wandered into our yard and we kept him for a few months before he ran away. I think his name was Teddy. Another year we found a beautiful boxer loose on the street and kept him for a night or two until his owner was located and picked him up. We were sad to see him go.

Wrestling was popular on TV back then and one of the most famous wrestlers was Antonio Rocca, an Italian-born Argentine. He was one of the "good guys" and was known for his acrobatics in the ring. We saw him wrestle at the National Guard Armory, winning the match with his signature "Argentine Backbreaker" move. I got his autograph on a slip of paper, but eventually lost it. A shoe box of baseball cards was lost too. Some of these rare cards sell for \$10,000 today.

One year the Dads got together and formed a stock investment club. They contributed about \$25 monthly to a pool. Investments were decided at a monthly meeting with a lot of noisy debate. I can't

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recall how long this lasted or if they ever made any money from the venture. Dad also participated in the savings bond program at General Aniline starting with war bonds in WW II.

The birth of Mary Ann Imbriaco was an exciting event on South St. After four boys-Patty, Johnny, Donald and Frankie, Aunt Angie and Uncle Pat were overdue for a girl. A steady stream of relatives and neighbors came to see this beautiful baby with curly blonde hair! Uncle Pat named his boat the "Mary Ann", proudly displayed in large letters on the stern.

Who could forget the open-air market along 2nd Ave. (see photo below) where we shopped for fruits and vegetables? The curb-side peddlers had traditional Italian specialties like cucuzza (squash) and melanzana (eggplant) which Mom pronounced something like mullin-yan. There were baskets of live snails and dandelions for sale. Fabric bolts and kitchenware were on display too. Lisa remembers Steiner's market which offered whole loaves of coarse rye bread, stored on wood shelves, and nuts, spices and chile peppers in burlap bags. The market was a crowded, noisy place on Saturday mornings, with the peddlers shouting their wares *"hey getcha fresh here"*. Nearby were poultry, meat, and fish stores.

Another memory of the market is ordering a fresh-killed chicken at the poultry store. We kids were fascinated by a tall black worker with a white paper hat who grabbed the chickens from a pen, slit their throats, gutted them and then put them on a rotating wire wheel to rip off the feathers. He sliced them up and wrapped the parts, including the neck and gizzard (used for soup), in heavy brown paper and tied it with a string. These chickens, which didn't have the antibiotics and preservatives used today, tasted great at Sunday afternoon dinner!

On market day we often saw Val, Louie, Joe or Bob Imbriaco visit their mother Giovannina who lived with daughter Gloria in one of the ground floor flats at 223 South St. Giovannina (we pronounced this Juanina) was married to Antonio Imbriaco, who died at a young age in 1929. Antonio was the nephew of our grandfather John Imbriaco. I remember Giovannina wore black mourning clothes for many years. She spoke mainly Italian so we kids could not converse with her much. We would see her now and then sweeping the front or rear stoop with a little broom. Gloria worked as an executive secretary at the Singer Sewing Machine Co. which employed thousands of people in Elizabeth. She never married but was close to her nieces and nephews. Kay Mele, who lived across the street, was a good friend and they often went to New York City together.

Remember how hot and stuffy the railroad rooms in the South St. flats were in the summer? During one heat wave Dad bought a large window fan at the Two Guys from Harrison store on N. Broad St. This gave us some relief at night. During a thunderstorm, Dad got up to shut the fan off just when a bolt of lightning struck right outside the window. He was knocked backwards on his butt, shaken up but unhurt. Another way to beat the heat was a sleepover at Aunt Millie's. Uncle Emil had installed a large window air conditioner and it cooled the rooms quite well. And you could always take a walk to DiCosmo's stand on 4th Ave. in Peterstown and cool off with their home-made lemon ice.

On a few weekends, I think in the late 40s-early 50s, Mom and Dad went out of town and left us at Aunt Annie's on Race St. I liked their big back yard and seeing the steam locomotives roaring thru, spewing black smoke. We put pennies on the tracks to flatten them. At night you fell asleep to the "clackety-clack" of trains passing by. There was an outdoor shed with a stuffed tiger's head with snarling fangs hanging on the door.

Juny warned us to stay away from the gang of kids on the corner of Race St-they were a bunch of toughs always looking for a fight. I think their name was McGutchie or something like that. I remember Aunt Annie, who was called "Dizzie Annie" for some reason, cooked us stuffed cabbage, not one of my favorite dishes. I was a little jealous of Juny who got his own special meal of a grilled steak and french fries!

Millie sent me the following remembrance: *"We had a wonderful "Little Farm" on Race St. Our father Freddie, along with being a barber and having his own shop in Hillside, was a great little farmer. He grew all kinds of vegetables and fruit trees; to name a few of the goodies: Jersey tomatoes, corn, peppers, peach trees, pear trees, and cherry trees. We also we had grape vines and our mother Annie would*

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make home-made grape jelly. We had a couple of fig trees from Italy and I could remember Uncle Dom coming over just to get some of the figs, he loved them so much.

At night to entertain ourselves we would listen to the stories on the radio and use our imagination to picture the story. We had a wonderful simple life growing up on Race Street."

Carol told me that Aunt Annie once came alone to their house on Montgomery St. She said she had gone to the movies alone because she was "mad at them". I guess Aunt Annie was giving her family a cooling off period before returning home!



Continental School No. 3 at Corner of 2nd Ave. and S. 7th St.

We went to Continental School No. 3 located just a few blocks from our home. It was a no-frills elementary school but we learned the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic very well. The school had a small library, music room, gym, lunch room, and an asphalt playground for recess and softball games.

Ronny and I started kindergarten the same year but were in different classes. I remember Mom and Aunt Millie walking us to school that day and staying with us in the classrooms for a little while, wiping away the tears. But we were soon

immersed in play activities like waterpaint coloring, paper mache (I loved the smell of the white paste), and musical chairs. The teacher brought out a large cardboard clock and we learned to tell time. In the afternoon we had to take a 20 minute nap on the floor using a blanket from home.

Some of the names of our teachers were Miss Smith, Reynolds, Wolf, Eckert, Regan, and Alston. Miss Regan liked to make popcorn in her second grade class. She would sing and play the piano for us right in the classroom. Memorable field trips included the Walker Dairy farm in Hunterdon and the Hayden Planetarium in New York. I remember the janitor sweeping the wood floors daily with a green powder and a huge broom. He kept dozens of keys on a ring attached to his belt. I think he also ran the coal-fired boiler for steam heat in the winter. In June and September the school could get hot and uncomfortable-no air conditioned schools back then!

Milk was available for your brown bag lunch at five cents a carton. We had fire drills and practiced the "duck and cover" routine in case of a nuclear attack-remember this was during the Cold War when relations with Russia were strained. We walked to school even in bad weather. One year our parents bought us matching yellow rain slickers with hoods from the Robert Hall store on the Avenue. When Mia, Joey and I walked to school we looked like a flock of little yellow ducks!

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Mabel G. Holmes

Our principal was Mabel G. Holmes, one of the first black principals in New Jersey. She was a very capable educator and always had our respect. Once we were making a lot of noise at an assembly and Miss Holmes came in and got our attention right away, warning us of the dire consequences of misbehavior! She appointed me as a school crossing guard in the fifth or sixth grade.

I remember some of my classmates-Jim Colicci, John Principato, Jackie O'Brien, Angelo Paternoster, Anthony Scrofine, Billy Burke and Jacqueline De Francesco who said her family was related to the Imbriacos somehow. Billy was one of the few kids who could blast a softball over the schoolyard fence. I recently heard from Carmine Sabia who was a year older and in the same class with Joey and Johnny.

Angelo Paternoster stayed in Peterstown and was Councilman of the 6th Ward for more than 30 years. His family owned the Paternoster Brothers store on 2nd Ave. and his grandmother owned Nicolette's grocery on 4th Ave. Angelo used to sell paper shopping bags in the open-air market for a nickel when he was a kid.

When we finished School No. 3 we began seventh grade in the Grover Cleveland Jr. High School located quite a few blocks further south. But we all walked to school back then-getting a car ride was unheard of and besides none of our Moms had a driver's license (the only Aunt who drove was Mary Bene). Some of my best teachers were Mr. Flynn (history), Mr. Lee Gaskins (art), and Mr. Arnold Highsmith (geography). Mr. Highsmith, a black Air Force veteran of the Korean War, was an outstanding and very motivational teacher. Discipline in this school was a problem. There was a detention room 101 supervised by Miss Lyman, a teacher with a commanding presence that intimidated students. I think Joey served some time in room 101.

It's getting hard to remember our neighbors but a few names come to mind. East of our house was the mysterious Gartz home. Mr. Gartz was rarely seen. The shades were always down. Mrs. Gartz did not like kids going into her yard to retrieve balls. We had to wait until she was out of the house to sneak into her yard. The Ciccios and Burriscanos were friendlier and we played with their kids. Mrs. Ciccio was one of the few women on the block that drove a car. Vincent Ciccio, who was our age but twice as big, joined in our play. When Dad laid a new linoleum floor in the kitchen, he noticed it was misaligned. Tommy Burriscano came over and helped pull it up and reset it properly, saving the day.

An older couple lived in the house west of us. Their last name was something like Petrosa. Bruno worked in a men's shirt factory off Elizabeth Avenue. Mom bought us some dress shirts there. A teenage boy further down the block named Richie had a crush on Mia. Dad didn't like him coming around and one night chased him down the block back into his house. That was the last we saw of Richie!

Across the street was Mary Schiatano whose son Sal was a few years older than me. He played softball in the City league games held at O'Brien Field. Next door to them was an Italian family with a son Ray who was a year or two older. He introduced us to Playboy magazines and Parliament cigarettes when we were around 12 or 13. We puffed away behind the garage doors with Joey inhaling with no problem, but the first time I inhaled I got dizzy, felt queasy and never smoked again! I guess we wanted to be like grownups-Dad smoked Chesterfield cigarettes until he quit around 1958.

Next door to the Schiatanos were Mildred Barnes and her handicapped sister Doris. They had us over once to see their canaries, some nesting on eggs. Claire Klem lived with her sisters at no. 208, the house with the side yard, and she had a daughter Cheryl. Cheryl Davis Ficarro contacted me recently and said she remembers Millie Krupa. Next door to the Klems was the Malzone family whose son Nick played baseball with us. He later died in a motorcycle accident. On the corner was the Gerko family whose daughter Georgette was in my sixth grade class. They may have come from Eastern Europe. Behind us on Reid St. lived twin girls who liked to drive around the block and show off their new pink '55 T-Bird convertible. Another family I remember on Reid St. were Irene Di Biasio and her son James, a few years older than me.

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By 1954 Dad had enough of the old Studebaker breaking down and we went to a Plymouth dealer on the corner of North Broad St. and Magnolia Ave. to buy a new car. He ordered the Savoy 4-door model with a stick shift and a dark green finish. When the salesman asked him if he wanted whitewalls for \$25 more, Dad said "Nah-can't afford them". We went to pick up the car a month later and noticed it had whitewall tires. I looked at Dad and we both smiled at our good luck. But then Mom blurted out to the salesman "Wasn't it supposed to come with black tires? The salesman said something like "Hey Charlie, put this one up on the rack and put blackwalls on it." I guess Mom had just given us a lesson in honesty, but Dad was miffed and the ride home was very quiet! Cars were built with poor quality in that era and two weeks later Dad brought the car back to the dealer to fix a long list of defects.

As time marched on and kids became teenagers, the parents saw the need to settle in their own homes with more living space, a modern kitchen, and to enjoy a grassy yard in a suburban setting. In 1954 Uncle Al and Aunt Mary bought an old farm house on several acres in Metuchen. Uncle Al soon remodeled it like new and the Forestieres moved out. In the next year or two the Hubbards moved to a new home in Iselin, Uncle Pat and Aunt Angie to a new home in Hillside, and Uncle Dom and Aunt Fill to a new home in Union. Uncle Nunz and Aunt Mary left Montgomery St. and moved into a new home on Irvington Ave. in Elizabeth. In 1957 the Baptistas moved to a home on Westfield Ave. in the Elmora section of Elizabeth. Chet and Millie Krupa, with boys Ken, Ron and Alan, left South St. a few years later, moving to Colonia. The Fonsecas and Gloria Imbriaco stayed on South St. for the remainder of their lives.

Moving away meant that a wonderful and formative chapter in our young lives had come to a close. I probably have looked back on this family history and our experiences with rose colored glasses. As you grow older you tend to become nostalgic and remember only the good times. Sure there were problems along the way-Dads laid off or injured on the job, family illnesses, the deaths of loved ones, minor spats between families, trouble at school and so forth. But the love of our parents and the emotional support from our extended family enabled us to handle life's difficulties to this day. Today families are dispersed far and wide so children miss out on growing up with their cousins and aunts and uncles nearby. Looking back, I wouldn't change a thing about our life on South Street!

Additional Resources on the Internet:

1) www.vimeo.com/8739660 This web site has the Imbriaco family history video shown at the 1996 reunion, wedding videos of the cousins, and Uncle Emil's home movies.

2) www.myheritage.com/site-110087421/imbriaco-family Our family history web site has an updated family tree, photo albums, "South Street Memories", "The Life of Joseph W. Imbriaco" (with details of his fatal plane crash in 1929), "The Summer of 1942" by Lisa Breiling, and "The Imbriaco Family Recipes" by Joanie Boudreau.